

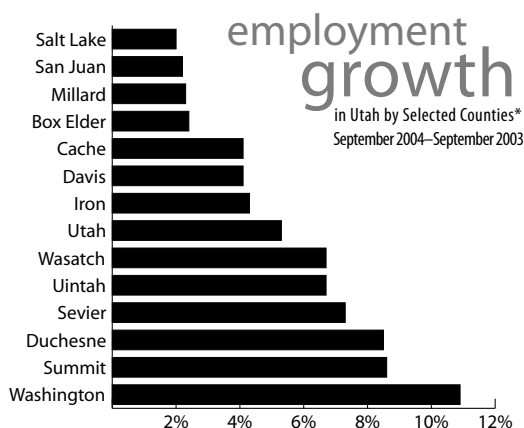
# The Wasatch Front

## Highlights

by Mark Knold

With 2004 now behind us, it can be looked upon in two different lights. On the one hand, the year produced a definite movement out of the recessionary funk

Utah experienced over the three previous years. With employment growth around 2.6 percent, 2004 is noticeably better than the employment contraction year of 2002, and the no-growth of 2003. On the other hand, it is yet another year in which Utah's employment growth rate came in lower than its historical average of 3.3 percent. This makes 2004 the seventh straight year of lower-than-average employment growth.



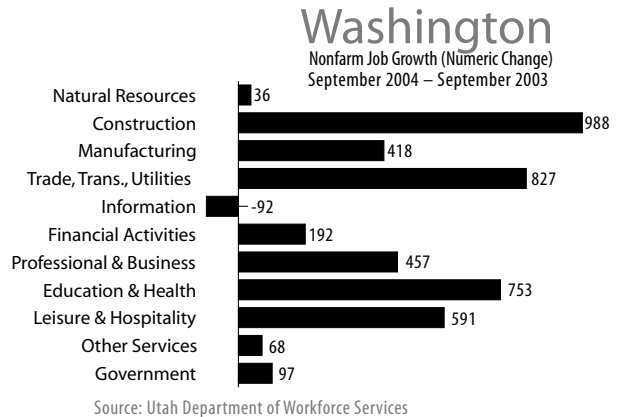
Source: Utah Dept. of Workforce Services

\* Only counties with employment levels of 4,000 or more are included. Only the top 14 counties are shown.

The area that just hasn't sprung back to life is the Salt Lake County economy, although it is stirring. While many parts of the state have experienced a strong employment rebound, Salt Lake County remains an underachiever. Employment growth is looking like it will come in at only 1.3 percent for the year, whereas Utah County, in contrast, will see a growth rate of around 5.0 percent. That is a large contrast.

The Salt Lake County economy is improving, but it's taken until the third quarter of this year to see the gains. The county started the year still in negative numbers. By the third quarter though, employment growth had risen to 2.0 percent.

The strongest region in the state is Washington County. The latest available data from September reveals employment growth at 11 percent. That is an incredible amount of growth in just one year. The industry that has added the most new jobs is construction, with nearly 1,000 new jobs since September of 2003. The construction industry is not generally a driver of an economy, instead taking its cue from the rest of the economy. But in the case of Washington County, it is a driver.



Strong population growth is fueling housing construction, particularly in the St. George-Washington-Hurricane region. Locals tell us that a population surge coming out of the Las Vegas area is one of the primary factors driving this current growth. Housing prices in the Las Vegas area have risen by 50 percent in just the last year alone. People may be looking to keep their ties to the Vegas market but getting far enough away to escape its housing prices.

To follow the latest economic events:  
<http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/press/tlextra/tlextracurrent.asp>



- ✓ A group of Utah investors repossessed Elk Meadows ski area in southern Utah and hope to see it reopened. <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600101162,00.html>
- ✓ Utah is the nation's seventh-fastest-growing state with a population that rose by 1.6 percent over the past year. <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600099492,00.html>
- ✓ Bankrupt Geneva Steel may claim a projected \$90 million by selling its water rights, which should be enough water for the thousands of homes, businesses and light industrial facilities envisioned for the 1,700-acre Vineyard site. <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,595113772,00.html>